

ADJUSTABLE FEDERATION.

It has always seemed to me that a very simple solution would, as the natural one, force itself quietly into discussion on the problem of Imperial Federation. Some definite plan is plainly needed, if we are to overcome the misgivings of the peoples interested, at entering into a new relation of such vast importance and totally untried kind. The plan must also be no elaborate contrivance or theoretical experiment, and must ask no great outlay, to be lost if it do not succeed. But the chief feature it must place beyond suspicion is that relating to the liberties and powers of the different great communities that are proposed as members of the union. Each of these will be jealous to keep intact all that it possesses—and no imperial council or constitution must interfere with them. The British Parliament must be supreme in Britain, the colonial Parliaments, if anything, even more free than at present. It must be a confederate, not a federal, union. Room must be left for that national independence after which each colony is feeling and which is not incompatible with federation. A plan answering to these demands is not impossible. A satisfactory solution indeed appears upon the surface, and it is satisfactory for the sole reason that it is simple, natural and perfectly controllable. I might name it adjustable federation.

First of all, let us give up the idea of starting with a Council: a conference of commissioners from Britain and the colonies is enough to commence with. Let the communities, through this body, state and investigate the points, detail by detail, in which expense could be saved or other advantage gained by any sort of action in common. Let the commissioners go back and report, and then, further empowered, meet again and arrange for the solution of each detail by itself upon which an agreement can be arrived at; and leave the rest aside. As far as Canada is concerned, for instance, she would arrange, in the matter of a consular system, for the appointment of a consul or ambassador of her own at Paris, Washington, Rio Janeiro and at any other points where her interests called for it, and give him what powers and title she pleased, while over most of the rest of the world she would use—and pay a share for—the general system of the Empire. By this method Canada could make her commercial treaties separately where desired. A joint system of offence and defence is perhaps the most obvious common interest of the Empire. I am glad to remark that, among the other generous feelings of the colonists toward the Mother Country there is a growing conviction that all ought to contribute to the expense of the general protecting armament. The commissioners could, I think, without difficulty arrive at some temporary agreement as to the proportions of contributions. Each colony would, for the most part, provide its own fortifications and militia. As to classification of wars into imperial and local and their treatment, this I consider presents no greater difficulty than the ordinary one of legal classification. If a generous spirit, especially toward the weak members, be fostered, all difficulties are solvable; and a generous spirit I think, could not but animate such a body, met upon such principles, for no other temper would attain any result in a voluntary union.

It can be seen how this scheme of adjustable Federation could be applied to the other questions, and into what a flexible condition it would throw our Union, leaving all free, yet binding each to the rest wherever a bond would give strength or advantage; teaching the peoples of the empire to know one another; nay, preparing the way also for the coming alliance of English-speaking nations and for that certain final constitution, "The Federation of the World." The Conference of Commissioners would crystallize gradually into a Council and decisions be left to its vote.

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